

was spent in preparation, digging, wiring, and putting in guns as quickly as available supplies and equipment arrived. Supply difficulties increased as the air attacks developed. The number of planes available, the exposed position of the aerodromes, and the scale of the enemy air attack made it impossible for the R.A.F. to operate from Crete. I asked that the few remaining fighter aircraft be sent to Egypt to avoid useless loss of lives of the pilots who had fought gallantly against tremendous odds. The Egyptian aerodromes were too far away to give effective help, and the Germans had complete air superiority.

BATTLE FOR CRETE.

The battle started on the 20th May with tremendous air bombardment followed by glider and parachute landings over the Canea-Maleme area. The troops were in the Maleme-Canea sectors, where the main attack was launched. The majority of the parachutists were mopped up, but some gained a footing in the areas away from the defences. The Greek King was nearly captured. Maleme sector was vital, and here the 5th Brigade Group, including some battalions of the 4th Brigade Group, met the attack from the west, while the 4th and 10th Brigade Groups fought along Galatos Ridge. On the first day relays of enemy aircraft straffed our positions, and fierce hand-to-hand fighting raged on Maleme Aerodrome. At the close of the day the forces faced each other on the east and west of the aerodrome. On the second day, although the aerodrome remained no-man's land and was under fire from captured Italian guns manned by our artillery, troop-carriers landed there and beyond the aerodrome in the river-bed, regardless of losses. Parachute reinforcements also arrived, and the savage air bombardment continued. A three-hour attack on Galatos was repulsed. That night we watched the navy send sea-borne invaders to the bottom. A counter-attack before dawn on the third day reached Maleme Aerodrome, but heavy dive-bombing at daylight made further progress impossible, and later in the day an attack by the enemy on our flank forestalled our plan for another counter-attack and forced us to withdraw to a shorter line. Heavy fighting continued on the fourth and fifth days on the new line and at Galatos, where attacks were again repulsed. Sunday, the sixth day, was critical and hard for the tired Australian and New Zealand troops. After continuous air straffing all day a strong enemy attack took Galatos in the evening, but the British light tanks and New Zealand infantry retook it at the point of the bayonet. In my opinion, this was one of the great efforts in the defence of Crete. With Maleme Aerodrome no longer under fire troop-carriers poured in with reinforcements of men and equipment. Tired troops could not withstand this indefinitely, and on Sunday night the New Zealand Division and the Australians were ordered to withdraw to a new line west of Suda. Between Canea and Maleme the New Zealand Division, later supported by Brigadier Vasey's Australian Brigade, had fought for six days without respite. More than twenty fierce bayonet counter-attacks were carried out. Fighting was the most bitter of this war, and such fierce hand-to-hand fighting had seldom been seen, while the scale of enemy air attack was unprecedented. With Brigadier Vasey's Brigade, our 5th Brigade covered the withdrawal from Suda. Here at the finish of our real defence the men in the front line said, "Let's fix bayonets and go for them." A joint New Zealand and Australian bayonet charge drove the enemy back over a thousand yards, but the position could not be held. On the withdrawal to Sphakia Beach our battalions fought rearguard actions together with Australians and Royal Marines. The bulk of the fighting troops were evacuated, but losses were heavy. Many of our wounded had to be left behind with doctors and medical orderlies, who had spontaneously volunteered to stay with them.

The above is only a brief outline, largely confined to a record of our own units, in an effort to give a picture of the campaign to those at home. We pay tribute to all our comrades—British, Australian, and Greek—who fought so gallantly in both campaigns. Our greatest admiration and gratitude go to the Royal Navy, who guarded Crete so effectively from sea-borne invasion and brought so many safely back from Greece and Crete. History will show these campaigns in their true perspective.